Spatial reorganization of AFS

Participatory development of the daily operations of a volunteer organization

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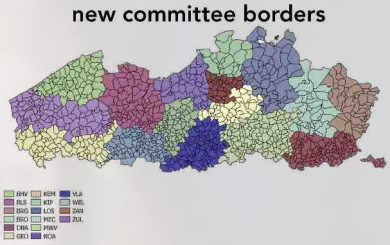
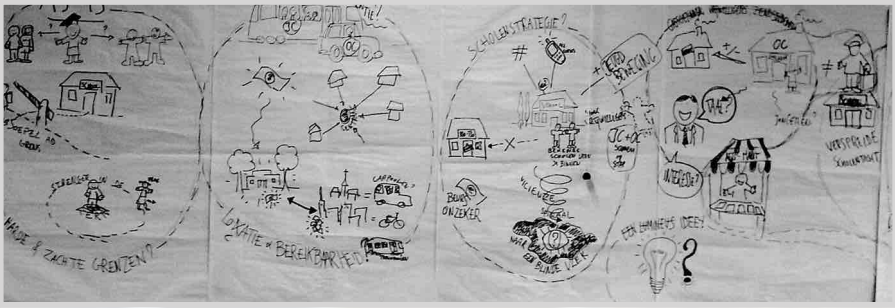
Between April 2016 and February 2017 AFS Flanders, a non-profit organization who engages students, families and volunteers for a more just and peaceful world through intercultural learning and exchange, called in the help of Expeditions for the reorganization of their day to day operations. As the way students, families and volunteers organize their activities had changed throughout the years , they no longer matched the existing organizational structures of AFS. More specifically, the borders of the local committees needed an update. Expeditions developed a participatory research trajectory in which all members of the organization (students, families, volunteers, staff and board) co-designed the new spatial organization of AFS.

The research project consisted of three phases. In a first stage, Expeditions organized focus group interviews with all local committees in order to get an overview of their daily workings. This exploratory qualitative research phase shed light on the current spatial organization of the different committees and their spatial or other organizational needs. Secondly, Expeditions complemented the input of the AFS members with relevant information about the spatial organization of Flanders, such as transport systems and urban influence spheres. We investigated the possibilities of the spatial organization in Flanders for a more efficient organization for volunteers when organizing activities, collaborating with schools, reaching out to new members and so on.

Final proposition for new committee borders



Lastly, drawing on the collected data, AFS members started to redesign the borders of the local committee regions, guided by Expeditions researchers. This led to a new spatial organization which better meets the current needs of the local committees. Because of the consultation method of co-design, these far-reaching changes were met with a large support of all members, staff and board, and has been implemented immediately within AFS.